

Mary Lou Terrien

From: Elaine Kaiser <elainekaiser1@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, February 23, 2016 1:26 PM
To: Mary Lou Terrien
Subject: Opposition to House Bill 5232 and Senate Bill 720!

I **strongly object to House Bill 5232 and Senate Bill 720** and the proposed changes to 1970 Public Act 169 Local Historic Districts Act and urge you not to pass this!

The system we have is not broken—there is no need for the amendments proposed in HB 5232 and SB 720 and **they go too far**. Significant resources in Michigan rely on protection from inappropriate alterations, incompatible new construction, and development pressures that often result in demolition. Such protection comes in the form of Michigan's current state law, PA 169 of 1970, enabling local governments to choose to safeguard their historic resources within local historic districts across the state. These proposed amendments completely change the way the local historic designation process and district administration works in response to several mistaken assumptions.

The preservation of historic places is a public purpose, upheld by the Supreme Court, and the preservation of historic assets is a long-term goal—it takes a longer view than the property ownership that will probably change every seven years or so. **The proposed changes in HB 5232 and SB 720 undermine the ability of a community to pursue protection of important local landmarks** by requiring that 2/3 of property owners within a proposed district boundary first consent to establishing a local historic district. Furthermore, requiring that exact boundaries for a potential local historic district be proposed before appointing a study committee is contradictory to the work the committee is charged with doing—completing research about the significance of historic resources and the area including the boundaries, which are often determined by contiguous architectural styles, plat maps, and other relevant information uncovered during the research process.

These bills severely jeopardize local historic districts in Michigan through their requirement that local historic districts be voted on every 10 years. Not only is such a process exceptionally inefficient, it would be costly to a local government in its dedication of staff time and community education efforts. This modification to PA 169, should it be amended through these bills, would clearly threaten all local historic districts statewide.

The bills' sponsors also believe that there is not enough flexibility in the current Standards local historic district commissions use. These Standards—the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation—are the gold, national standard in historic preservation; they preserve historic materials and character-defining features while allowing for building adaptations, and they allow for replacement materials and they require that technical and economic feasibility be considered.

The current system is not broken and the changes these bills propose would not be fixes in any case. The amendments are so sweeping it appears that, if these bills pass in current form, federal funding for Michigan preservation projects through the Certified Local Government program—one of the VERY few grant programs for historic buildings—would be jeopardized. In Michigan, over 90% of applications for work in local historic districts are approved by commissions. There are less than 8 appeals per year in Michigan, on average, and

this average is declining. The idea that voters need to vote again on an issue that their elected local legislative unit passed is inefficient, expensive, and unnecessary. And mandating a unit-wide election every 10 years to keep the districts the community has already passed is an expensive administrative wreck. It is unnecessary and cumbersome that the State should have to issue a sunset clause on local decisions.

House Bill 5232 and Senate Bill 720 should be resoundingly rejected. These bills would weaken protections for historic resources and threaten the viability of local historic districts in Michigan into the future. Our historic places and neighborhoods are too important.

Thank you,

Elaine Kaiser
Novi, Michigan